

For Immediate Release
February 19, 2015

Rutherford County Transit Recognized as 2015 Harvard Ash Center Bright Idea in Government

Spindale, NC – February 18, 2015 – The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, recognized today Rutherford County Transit as part of the 2015 Bright Ideas program. This year's cohort includes 124 programs from all levels of government—school districts; county, city, state, and federal agencies; as well as public-private partnerships—that are at the forefront in innovative government action.

Rutherford County Transit has been recognized by the Harvard Ash Center for the initiation of a grocery shuttle service. They were also recognized in 2014 by NaCO (National Associations of Counties) award for the same service project.

In 2013, Rutherford County Transit initiated free transportation shuttles to a local food pantry by recognizing that even when resources are available transportation is often a barrier. By listening to their passengers, they went outside the scope of traditional public transportation and created a service that meets their passengers' basic needs. Drivers recognized that there was a tremendous issue of hunger among passengers. For years, employees stocked a small pantry to help passengers. They knew the Transit was not equipped to directly hand out large quantities of food, but perhaps they could transport citizens to available resources. Churches and organizations have provided food to citizens for many years, but had not considered that those with the greatest need may not have transportation to get to those resources.

In January 2013, the Transit staff developed a schedule that worked efficiently for Transit, the passengers and the Storehouse Pantry. They created a rack card and flyers to promote the new service and placed them on all Transit vehicles. Staff identified five vehicles and drivers for the shuttle and purchased large tubs to place in the vans to hold the food. Vans could accommodate four passengers and four tubs, thus allowing Transit to provide service to twenty families per week. On January 24, 2013, the free Food Pantry Shuttle Service was launched.

The Food Pantry Shuttle Service introduced a substantially new service concept and fundamental change for public transportation. Transit now looks at services that are needed, and not just new route locations. For example, on February 9, 2015, Transit launched a new Laundromat service available to anyone in the county. Transit will provide free transportation to citizens to one of four Laundromats in order to help people who normally would not have a way to get there.

Transit continues to go outside the scope of traditional public transportation services to provide relief and better the lives of their passengers. They are putting the pieces together to bring the resources to those in need. Citizens have commented that these services have provided a tangible and visible way to use tax dollars to provide additional benefits to county residents.

“The Bright Ideas program demonstrates that often seemingly intractable problems can be creatively and capably tackled by small groups of dedicated, civic-minded individuals,” said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in Government Program at the Ash Center. “As exemplified by this year’s Bright Ideas, making government work better doesn’t always require massive reforms and huge budgets. Indeed, we are seeing that, in many ways, an emphasis on efficiency and adaptability can have further-reaching effects than large-scale reforms.”

This is the fourth cohort recognized through the Bright Ideas program, an initiative of the broader Innovations in American Government Awards program. For consideration as a Bright Idea, programs must currently be in operation or in the process of launching and have sufficient operational resources and must be administered by one or more governmental entities; nonprofit, private sector, and union initiatives are eligible if operating in partnership with a governmental organization. Bright Ideas are showcased on the Ash Center’s [Government Innovators Network](#), an online platform for practitioners and policymakers to share innovative public policy solutions.

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About the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Center fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world’s citizens. For more information, visit www.ash.harvard.edu.

About Rutherford County Transit

Rutherford County Transit was established in 1990 and is a self-funded department within Rutherford County Government. The purpose of Rutherford County Transit is to provide efficient and effective utilization of all available resources in the provision of safe, convenient and reliable transportation services, and to facility mobility choices for all individuals including the elderly, disabled, and clients of human service agencies.